

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

COME-00 TRSE-00 MMO-01 /067 W

----- 069269

R 011751Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1534

INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE

AMCONSUL MILAN

AMCONSUL NAPLES

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJECT: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON RECENT LOCAL ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY. ABOUT ONE MILLION ITALIANS VOTED ON NOVEMBER 21, 28 AND 29 FOR NEIGHBORHOOD AND CITY COUNCILS. THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS WERE PARTLY CONTRADICTORY AND DID NOT PROVIDE A WIDE ENOUGH STATISTICAL BASE FOR RELIABLE ANALYSIS. THE TREND TOWARD BIPOLARIZATION OF THE SYSTEM BETWEEN THE DC AND PCI SEEMS, HOWEVER, TO HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED. THE DC'S GAINS WERE MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN THOSE OF THE PCI, WHICH LOST GROUND IN SOME AREAS. THE PSI'S RESULTS INDICATE THAT THE STRATEGY OF THE CURRENT SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP MAY BE HELPING THE PSI DEFINE ITS ROLE IN A POLITICAL WORLD DOMINATED BY THE TWO LARGER PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE NOVEMBER 21 BALLOTING FOR NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS IN THE CITIES OF NOVARA AND TREVISO WAS FOLLOWED BY A ROUND OF ELECTIONS ON NOVEMBER 28 AND 29 FOR NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS IN THE CITIES OF FLORENCE, PERUGIA AND AREZZO, AND FOR MUNICIPAL COUNCILS IN TWELVE SMALL CITIES AND ONE HUNDRED SMALL TOWNS. THE RESULTS ARE OF COURSE TOO NARROWLY BASED TO PROVIDE A RELIABLE INDICATION OF

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VOTER SENTIMENTS FIVE MONTHS AFTER THE MOMENTOUS JUNE ELECTIONS.

INTERPRETATION IS ALSO COMPLICATED BY THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS, BY LOCAL ELECTORAL ALLIANCES BETWEEN PARTIES, AND BY THE "MAJORITY" SYSTEM OF VOTING IN THE TOWNS UNDER 5,000 POPULATION.

3. DESPITE THESE DIFFICULTIES, NO POLITICAL PARTY HAS NEGLECTED TO COMMENT ON THE RESULTS, AND ALMOST EVERY PARTY SEEMS TO HAVE FOUND SOMETHING TO BE HAPPY ABOUT. THIS WAS POSSIBLE BECAUSE THE RESULTS WERE CONTRADICTORY. WITH THE FLIMSINESS OF THE EVIDENCE VERY MUCH IN MIND, WE SEE THE ELECTION RESULTS AS CONFIRMING THE TENDENCY TO BIPOLARIZATION BETWEEN THE DC AND THE PCI OF THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, WE NOTE THAT THE PCI HAS BEEN GIVEN LITTLE TO CROW ABOUT AND THAT THE PSI HAS BEEN ABLE TO CLAIM AT LEAST A MODEST VICTORY. THE MSI LOST GROUND IN MOST OF THE POLLS.

4. THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL RESULTS IN FLORENCE PERUGIA, AND AREZZO DID NOT CONFIRM THE DRAMATIC DROP IN THE LEFTIST VOTE WHICH OCCURRED ON NOVEMBER 21 IN NOVARA, WHERE A COMBINED PCI-PSI-PSDI-PDUP LIST FAILED TO OBTAIN THE LEVEL OF VOTER SUPPORT WHICH THE PARTIES HAD REACHED SEPARATELY ON JUNE 20. INSTEAD, IN THE ABOVE THREE CITIES, THE PCI AND PSI BOTH GENERALLY GAINED SUPPORT OVER JUNE 20. PARADOZICALLY, THE DC AND THE LAY PARTIES (PSDI, PRI AND PLI) ALSO HAD MOSTLY FAVORABLE RESULTS. THE PCI AND PSI ADVANCES SEEM TO HAVE GENERALLY BEEN MADE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY LEFT AND THE RADICAL PARTY, WHICH WERE NOT EVEN PRESENT ON THE FLORENCE BALLOTS. THE DC AND LAY PARTIES PROFITED BY A WEAK SHOWING OF THE MSI. WHILE THE STRONG PCI SHOWING WAS TO BE EXPECTED IN ELECTIONS IN WHICH VOTER PARTICIPATION WAS RELATIVELY LOW (AROUND 82 PERCENT), THE PSI SUCCESS WAS MORE SURPRISING.

5. THE RESULTS IN THE 12 SMALL, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN, NON-PROVINCIAL-CAPITAL CITIES WERE MORE INTERESTING. THE PCI SUFFERED A DRAMATIC DROP, FROM 36.6 PERCENT IN JUNE TO 28.1 PERCENT. THIS BROUGHT THE PCI TO VIRTUALLY THE SAME LEVEL IT HAD OBTAINED (IN SOME CASES TOGETHER WITH THE PSIUP) IN THE PRECEDING CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, WHICH OCCURRED FIVE YEARS AGO IN MOST CASES. THE PSI GAINED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER JUNE 20, GOING FROM 8.5 PERCENT TO 11.4 PERCENT, BUT NOT REACHING THE 13 PERCENT OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ELECTORATE WHICH IT HAD ACHIEVED IN THE PRECEDING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. THE DC SCORED THE MOST SIGNIFICANT GAINS. ITS TOTAL OF 41.9 PERCENT EXCEEDED ITS JUNE 20 RESULTS BY OVER 3 PERCENT AND ITS SHARE IN THE PRECEDING CITY ELECTIONS BY OVER 2 PERCENT. THE LAY PARTIES WERE MOSTLY STATIONARY, EXCEPT FOR THE PRI, WHICH GAINED DRAMATICALLY OVER JUNE DUE TO LOCAL FACTORS. AS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS, THE MSI LOST SUPPORT. SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 95,000 VOTERS, 86.3 PERCENT OF THOSE ELIGIBLE,

PARTICIPATED IN THESE ELECTIONS.

6. THE ELECTION RESULTS IN THE 100 SMALL TOWNS ARE MOST DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF COMBINED LISTS AND COMPLEX SYSTEM OF DETERMINING THE VICTORS. COMBINED LEFTIST LISTS SEEM TO HAVE SCORED THE BIGGEST GAINS, AND THE DC LOST FOUR OF THE 36 TOWNS IT HAD CONTROLLED.

7. COMMENT: EVEN THOUGH ALMOST EVERY PARTY WAS ABLE TO POINT TO SOME BRIGHT SPOT IN THE ELECTION RESULTS, IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE DC GAINED THE MOST CONSISTENT AFFIRMATION. IN MOST CASES, IT INCREASED IT SHARE OF THE ELECTORATE OVER JUNE 20. THIS REVERSED THE USUAL PATTERN BY WHICH THE DC DOES BETTER IN NATIONAL THAN IN LOCAL ELECTIONS. THE PCI, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD TO BE CONTENT WITH MIXED RESULTS. IT DID WELL IN ITS TRADITIONAL LARGER CITY STRONGHOLDS, BUT RECEDED FROM ITS JUNE 20 HIGH IN THE SMALL CITY POLLS. FINALLY, THE SOCIALISTS RECEIVED A MUCH-NEEDED, EVEN THOUGH MINIMAL, BOOST. IN TYPICAL PSI FASHION, THE PARTY'S NEWSPAPER OVERPLAYED THE RESULTS, SEEING IN THE ELECTIONS A RINGING ENDORSEMENT OF "THE SOCIALIST, DEMOCRATIC AND LAY POLE" AND FURTHER PROOF THAT AN "ALTERNATIVE OF THE LEFT" DOES NOT YET EXIST AS A POSSIBILITY. THIS VIEW OF THE RESULTS SHOULD WORK TO STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF PSI PARTY SECRETARY CRAXI.VOLPE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, PARTY STRENGTH, LOCAL ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: vogelfj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ROME19631
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760446-0602
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761283/aaaactqh.tel
Line Count: 138
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vogelfj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <08 SEP 2004 by vogelfj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON RECENT LOCAL ELECTIONS
TAGS: PINT, IT
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006